This Position of the Government of the Republic of Poland contains answers to questions posed by the European Commission in the *Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion*¹ which was published in May 2007. This Government Position addresses for the first time an issue of the post-2013 cohesion policy design. The discussion on this topic was launched by the European Commission (Directorate General for Regional Policy) during the 4th Cohesion Forum in September last year. It is presently being continued in particular Member States as well as on the Community level.

Taking into consideration the very special role of our country² in the process of the cohesion policy delivery, Poland must take an active part in this debate. It must be borne in mind that the successes, as well as the failures, which will be encountered in implementation of the cohesion policy in Poland in the years 2007-2013, will deliver crucial arguments in the discussion on its future shape and determine the strength of our voice in this debate. On account of this, the Government of the Republic of Poland has already undertaken a number of initiatives on the Community and national levels.

Taking into account the positions of other cohesion policy stakeholders as presented in the Community debate on the future design of the post-2013 cohesion policy, representatives of the Polish Government have participated in several meetings at the Community level. This includes participation in meetings among new Member States (a meeting in Cyprus, in November 2007 and its continuation in Warsaw, January 2008), meetings initiated by the Portuguese Presidency (i.e. meeting of Ministries in charge of the regional development in Azores, September 2007), as well as participation in informal exchange of opinions with foreign research centres.

The future of the cohesion policy has been a topic of consultation in Poland itself among representatives of various fields of expertise; central and regional institutions involved in the delivery of cohesion policy in Poland as well as representatives of socio-economic partners and non-governmental organisations. This Government Position has been prepared on the basis of results of the above mentioned consultation process.

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¹ The *Fourth Cohesion Report* presents the current situation in the Member States and in the regions, and provides an analysis of the results of the cohesion policy. At the same time, it indicates the key factors for the successful realisation of Community priorities, as well as it addresses an issue of cohesion in the context of national and Community policies. In view of the fact that the reporting period of this year’s document spans two financial perspectives (2000-2006 and 2007-2013), such a report has, for the first time, made an attempt to provide an *ex ante* evaluation on the reformed cohesion policy launched at the very beginning of 2007. The questions included in the Report refer to three areas of concern i.e.: 1) the adequacy of the 2007-2013 cohesion policy with relation to new Community challenges, 2) the possibility to elaborate on an integrated and more flexible approach to development and growth under the cohesion policy, 3) the potential improvement of the cohesion policy delivery system.

² Poland has become the recipient of the largest ever amount of support from the European cohesion policy - in the history of the EU (almost 20% of the financial means of the 2007-2013 cohesion policy)
It must be borne in mind that other debates, which are simultaneously taking place on the Community level, have a crucial impact on the future design of the cohesion policy. Out of these debates, the most significant ones at the moment concern the review of the EU budget as well as the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy. Therefore, the constant cooperation of leading institutions in these processes, i.e. the Office of the Committee for European Integration, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is of the utmost importance.

The role of the cohesion policy in the attainment of the political goals of the EU and its position amongst the other community policies

1. The Government of the Republic of Poland underlines the high added value of the cohesion policy, and emphasises that its delivery brings visible effects in an economic and social sphere, on a regional, national and European scale; thereby diminishing the “development gap” between less and more developed areas of the EU. This is realised *inter alia* through: the provision of an impetus for enhancing the competition and innovation potential in Member States and regions; requiring application of an integrated approach in the process of implementation of development priorities; mobilising both public and private capital for more effective investment as well as deepening the process of integration by supporting the creation of the Single European Market. In the case of new Member States, it is additionally worth stressing that the cohesion policy contributes to achieving an institutional convergence through the promotion of modern models of multi-annual strategic and financial management, as well as transfer of exceptional know-how as regards an objective-oriented approach, programming, monitoring, control and evaluation.

2. Together with the adoption of the *Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs*, the cohesion policy has become a key instrument for the attainment of the Lisbon strategy objectives by orientating the measures undertaken towards strengthening the competitiveness. The Government of the Republic of Poland stresses the potential of the cohesion policy to address the altering priorities and challenges of the Community in a flexible way. At the same time, the Polish Government reaffirms its contribution to the attainment of EU goals, and, in particular, of the key and durable Treaty principle which underlies the whole Community system, and according to which this EU policy ensures the support for “economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among Member States”.

3. However, the Government of the Republic of Poland wishes to point out that, in response to the observed changes on the economic and social plane, the changes in the territorial dimension of Europe and the evolution of the expectations of particular Member States and of their citizens, the objectives, principles, as well as instruments and the delivery system of the cohesion policy should be subject to change. This is vital so that the policy could still remain an instrument which serves to take up the EU development objectives and which contributes to deepening of the European dimension of activities undertaken by the Community. Thereby the Government of the Republic of Poland, bearing in mind the positive effects of the cohesion policy delivery, reaffirms the will to

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ensure the continuation of the cohesion policy, while at the same time, stressing the need for change.

4. In the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Poland, a starting point of the debate on the future design of the cohesion policy should be a discussion on the political goals and development priorities of the EU. A debate on financial issues, including the place of particular policies in the EU budget, should be a further step in the discussion on EU goals and objectives of its policies. It should not, however, proceed it. Therefore, the Government of the Republic of Poland argues for coupling the debate on the cohesion policy with the review of the EU budget and Community policies, as well as for focusing the debate not exclusively on the financial side of the cohesion policy but on the real contribution of the cohesion policy to the attainment of EU political goals, as well as its response to the development challenges that the Community is now facing.

5. The Government of the Republic of Poland expresses its conviction that the cohesion policy should become an instrument for implementing pro-development pan-Community priorities, while at the same time preserving its focus towards equalising development levels of regions and EU Member States. It must be stressed that the further EU development, as well as the response to the challenges brought on by the global market, depend on an active EU attitude towards global challenges, indicated i.e. in the *Fourth Report*... An integrated approach, characteristic for the cohesion policy, ensures that this policy may become an effective instrument for the enhancement of both the development potential as well as the global competitiveness of all European regions. The cohesion policy should therefore contribute directly to the attainment of medium- and long-term EU strategic objectives, while concentrating, at the same time, on initiatives which create the European added value. In view of the potential of the policy in this respect, as well as of the pan-European benefits from its delivery, the Government of the Republic of Poland does not see any convincing arguments for the re-nationalisation of the cohesion policy.

In the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Poland, the creation of such a system, which, by establishing conditions for long-term growth, would be able to react to dynamic globalisation processes, is of the utmost importance. Thereby, it is necessary to stress the role of the cohesion policy in responding to global challenges, as the policy which has an integrating and horizontal character with relation to other Community policies.

6. Taking into consideration the postulate to make the cohesion policy the key instrument for the attainment of the long-term strategic EU goals, the Government of the Republic of Poland stresses the need to equip it with an adequate amount of resources (at least at the present level) which would enable addressing new challenges in an effective way.

The desired directions of changes in cohesion policy design

7. The Government of the Republic of Poland notes that the evolution of the cohesion policy’s role should be linked to its concentration on a limited number of objectives. Its support should be strongly oriented at pro-development investments, which are crucial, not only in national but also in the European and global scale of reference. At the same time, the policy should enable the regions to develop their adjustment capacity to global challenges. Therefore, the Government of the
Republic of Poland stresses that the above mentioned circumstances point at the necessity to concentrate on projects, which use regional growth potentials and simultaneously contribute to the attainment of Community goals that are identified with the creation of the European added value. These activities should be carried out on the basis of the solidarity principle, which has the objective to unite the Member States and regions in the aspiration to deliver common development priorities.

8. The Government of the Republic of Poland takes the view that the horizontal and integrated character of the cohesion policy, understood as a development policy combining social, economic and territorial dimensions, must be used in order to retain its role of the “promoter” of an integrated approach in meeting of EU development objectives. This concerns an application of such an approach in relation to activities carried out in the framework of particular Community sectoral policies, as well as activities undertaken in the framework of both national policies and regional strategies. The attainment of the EU development objectives is thus related to the necessity to discuss how to determine co-existing mutual relations between Community policies, including both the instruments as well as the principles for their delivery. It should first of all refer to the following areas: competitiveness (enterprises), R+D, social capital, territorial development and in a broader context – spatial development, development of TEN networks, environmental protection and finally, rural development. A more integrated approach as regards funds’ activities and their delivery system under the cohesion policy itself is also necessary. They should react to any identified problems and challenges in a complementary way, in order to attain common EU goals. In this context, it is worth considering the abandonment of the funds’ separation approach, particularly in respect of ERDF and ESF or to couple them more tightly as they strive to achieve the same goals at the EU level.

The Government of the Republic of Poland stresses the need for an in-depth analysis of the principles and instruments used to provide support to rural areas. The experience from the 2004-2006 programming period and the elaboration of the 2007-2013 programming documents clearly indicate an overlapping of similar kinds of interventions under the Common Agricultural Policy and the cohesion policy. Such overlap leads to weakening of an integrated approach at the Community level towards the rural development support. In relation to this, the Government of the Republic of Poland finds it necessary to review the effectiveness of the Community instruments in favour of rural development, as well as the means of their coordination and delivery.

9. The Government of the Republic of Poland welcomes the introduction by the Treaty of Lisbon of a territorial cohesion notion. The incorporation of this additional aspect of cohesion is justified because of the fact that, together, along with the dynamic evolution of the EU socio-economic situation, an aspect of territorial disparity is becoming a key issue. This change should help to rationalise the cohesion policy and to influence its delivery system in a positive way.

The territorial dimension of the cohesion policy may become an element which would integrate Community policies, thereby increasing the possibilities to address effectively the challenges the EU is currently facing. A right step in this direction would be an in-depth debate on both the European
and national levels in order to translate new Treaty provisions into the overall goals’ architecture of the EU and to assess an impact of new Treaty provisions on functioning of particular delivery instruments of the Community policies, including the cohesion policy. In this context, it becomes necessary to define the notion of the territorial cohesion, and to elaborate clear indicators for measuring it and its impact on the way in which the cohesion is measured. The Government of the Republic of Poland particularly points out the need to define effective instruments which allow for the achievement of a territorial balance between urban and rural areas, and which support the maintenance and development of a polycentric settlement system.

10. The Government of the Republic of Poland favours looking for a new balance in the architecture of relations between the EC (and within it) and Member States, regions, actors at local level as well as other stakeholders (such as social and economic partners, including non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs), which are involved in the delivery of the cohesion policy.

A system of multi-level governance should rest on a task-related and multisided choice of partners that are interested in a given field of intervention, as well as it should function in a wider context than traditional partnerships along the European Commission - Member States’ governments – regional authorities line. An emerging new model of partnership, which includes newer stakeholders, should provide a platform for a broad reflection within the context of the attainment of the Community policies’ objectives, including the cohesion policy. With regard to the widening of a catalog of cohesion policy addressees (e.g. the growing position of cities), the role of the regions should be re-discussed.

The Government of the Republic of Poland recognises a crucial role of the European Commission in ensuring the European added value of projects financed from EU resources.

11. The Government of the Republic of Poland favours an introduction of solutions, which serve both an increase in efficiency of the instruments for the cohesion policy delivery as well as an enhancement of its effectiveness in the context of meeting its objectives. This concerns the solutions which will primarily influence the effectiveness of making use of resources, and not the speed of their absorption. What is fundamental to this aim is a broader application of evaluation tools, which to a greater extent, should concentrate on an assessment of the efficiency of the cohesion policy assistance and its effectiveness in the achievement of long-term Community goals, as well as the creation of the European added value. An on-going evaluation should be used in a more effective way than it has been used so far. Such evaluations should be aimed at the continual provision of recommendations which pay attention to the desired changes in the delivery system of the policy in the context of striving for the more efficient use of resources as well as the attainment of the Community goals.

12. The Government of the Republic of Poland supports the attempts which favour the further development of initiatives undertaken in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation and European Neighbourhood Policy – and particularly with reference to the Eastern dimension. In relation to that the Polish Government notices a need, on the one hand, to simplify the principles of its implementation while, on the other hand, to gradually increase the budget
dedicated to this type of cooperation. Territorial cooperation, including cooperation with countries from outside the EU, is a key factor for the development of the territorial cohesion. It also has a political dimension. By virtue of projects and initiatives which will be created in the framework of Objective 3 of the cohesion policy, regions and local societies in the Member States which actively contribute to EU development, will be able to export their experience, elaborated principles of cooperation and partnership as well as values to neighbouring regions outside of the EU’s borders.

13. The Government of the Republic of Poland takes an active part in the discussions which are progressing under various forums within the EU, and which are focused on the need to define, in a complex way, indicators for the development measurement. There is a need to search for such indicators, which take into account not only economic aspects which are traditionally measured with the help of GDP, but also complementary indicators which take into consideration such factors as: demographic, social, educational, environmental, territorial issues. At the same time the time perspectives used to make research on the development processes should be prolonged. It is important to make indicators demonstrate the actual effects and impacts of the cohesion policy on development in all of those dimensions (this essentially concerns a wider application of impact indicators which demonstrate the long-term effects from the financial and non-financial perspective).

Summary

This Government Position is a result of preliminary works on the Polish vision of the desired direction and evolution of the post-2013 Community cohesion policy.

The next stages of this process will take into consideration the debates related to the review of the EU budget and of the Community policies, the work of subsequent Presidencies as well as discussions linked to the publication of Community reports on cohesion within EU. The strategic part of the process will finish at the point when the European Commission presents a proposal for a regulatory and financial design of the cohesion policy in the framework of a subsequent financial perspective, which is expected in 2011. In this context, it must be noted that this phase will coincide with Poland’s Presidency in the Council of the European Union.

In relation to the above mentioned, the Government of the Republic of Poland, will make adequate updates of this Position while taking an active part in the further process of shaping the cohesion policy on both the Community and national levels.